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**Resilience in Organizations: The perspective of Managers in Portugal and  
Germany**

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Resilience in Organizations:  
The perspective of Managers in Portugal and Germany

**Abstract**

The concept of organizational resilience has become popular in Organizational Studies during the last decades - yet researchers have not been able to find one commonly accepted definition for what exactly it is. What are the drivers of resilience in organizations? Are there certain cultural factors and national differences regarding the perception of the concept? This paper aims to answer these questions from a perspective of within institutions. A group of managers from different corporations in Portugal and Germany has been interviewed in order to understand how managers experience and characterize organizational resilience. Based on qualitative inductive research the results show that organizational resilience is built on four main drivers: a sense of proximity, a sense of openness, a sense of challenge and a sense for structure.

**Key words:** organizational resilience, managers, drivers of resilience, workplace environment

## **1. Introduction and past research**

We are living in an era of global economic and geopolitical incertitude. The past decades have been fraught with challenges and risks. Matchless change, economical crises as well as natural disasters like the tsunami in 2011 in front of Japans' coastline or terroristic events like September 11 are occurring more frequently and not seldom result in business disruptions. Not only financial institutions but also other organizations are failing more often (Bell, 2002). As Hamel and Välikangas (2003, p.2) state, this leads to the so called "resilience gap": "The world is becoming turbulent faster than organizations are becoming resilient". This raises organizational resilience to a new level of importance. Other than the concept of resilience as a reaction to odds, resilience can also be created actively, fulfilling a preventive function. Rapid changes in technology, intense global competition and increasing demands of customers create a very challenging business environment. Therefore an organization that doesn't only aim to survive disruptions and catastrophic events but that also wants to retain a competitive position needs to have the ability to maintain "adaptive, proactive and reactive" towards any kind of change (Braes & Brooks, 2010, p.16). Organizational resilience is also important not only to make companies survive but also because resilient organizations have a lower turnover, lower health care costs and employees experience increased productivity (Lee, 2008). Furthermore "resilient employees are engaged, have improved communication, and are better team players" (White, 2013, p.3).

As before alluded in past research two forms of resilience are distinguished: active and reactive resilience. According to Dovers and Hadmer (1992) reactive resilience aims to strengthen the current system and make it resistant towards change, while active

resilience describes the process of continuous adaptability to new conditions and a willingness to active change.

The foundation for research in resilience was built 1973 by Holling, describing ecological resilience as “the persistence of systems and their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between state variables” (Bhamra et al. 2011, p. 5379). Nevertheless the concept of resilience is mostly derived from the area of psychology. The American Psychology Association defines *personal resilience* as “the process of adapting well in face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats and even significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stresses” (APA, 2013). In physical sciences something that resumes its original shape after being bent or stretched is considered to be resilient (Southwick & Charney 2012). We can see that the concept of resilience has been investigated from different disciplines, proving its complexity and multidimensionality. It was during the 1980s that the concept was first put in an organizational context, when Martin Seligman started to investigate how the concept of resilience could help employees to deal with difficult situations at their workplace (Cooper et al, 2013). Marcos (2008, p.1) later specified that “resilience is the organizational capability to anticipate key events from emerging trends, constantly adapt to change, and rapidly bounce back from disaster.” This is only one of several definitions that have been proposed. Even though resilience has become crucial for organizations, yet there is little consistency in the use of the expression *organizational resilience*.

So in the end what exactly is organizational resilience? What is it that makes some institutions able to not only survive, but also to thrive in the face of adversity? How do

people from within organizations define resilience and what are the essential factors that contribute making a corporation resilient? What is more important for managers: the concept of active or reactive resilience? Are there certain cultural factors and national differences regarding the perception of the concept? The purpose of this project is to answer these questions from the perspective of leaders from within the organizations: the managers. Besides evolving the concepts from that particular perspective of how managers experience and characterize organizational resilience, this paper also aims to involve a cultural aspect, what in most of the existing studies has been left out. Additionally most of the available papers are either focusing on personal resilience or when dealing with organizational challenges they are focused on the negative aspects about it. Reversing the before mentioned perspective this work project focuses on the opportunities about challenges in organizational environments. The research is based on interviews with institutional leaders. Managers, members of military, politicians and University professors in Portugal and Germany have been interviewed on the topic and the results derived from these interviews have been developed in a qualitative, inductive study. The evolved theory is useful for Human Resource departments in order to help them develop a workplace environment that boosts organizational resilience.

The work is structured as follows: After the past research is presented very briefly in the part above, the *grounded theory* that is used for this paper, the sample process as well as the procedure of the overall work is explained precisely. The preparation of the interviews, selection of the questions, matching process of interview partners as well as the process of transcription, interpretation of the self-reported data and category building are described. Subsequently in the third chapter, the main part of the work project, the results of the conducted qualitative study are analyzed. How do managers

characterize organizational resilience and what are the main factors a corporation needs to care about in order to build a resilient work environment? The presented sample offers the opportunity to gain perspectives out of different organizations, from different levels of power and from different nationalities. In order to evolve an unbiased result the data was grounded and classified in a three column table, representing 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> order concepts (see appendix). The outcome shows that managers were able to define organizational resilience broadly and from different angles, also showing to which concept of resilience (active or reactive) the majority gives more importance. Furthermore two soft and two hard factors crucial for resilience in organizations could be developed. The study emphasizes the importance of the workplace environment and the spirit within an institution for organizational resilience. In the penultimate chapter implications of the findings are discussed for the literature, before a conclusion is drawn in the last part of the work.

## 2. **Method**

For the development of the findings a qualitative inductive study (Gioia et al., 2012), following the principles of *grounded theory* was conducted. It's a systematic method applied mainly in social sciences and has been evolved by the two sociologists Glaser and Strauss. (O'Reilly et al., 2012). This approach allowed me to evolve my own understanding and theory of organizational resilience and simultaneously grounding the assumption on the collected data. The method made perfect sense for this work project because it implies to start collecting data without any hypothesis (Martin & Turner, 1986). The objective was to work without the tight bondage of studies and theories that have been evolved before.

After the realization of interviews, categories have been evolved from that raw data through constant comparison of data and theory (O'Reilly et al., 2012). Following the principles of inductive coding the categories have been evolved moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories (*bottom up approach*) (Gioia et al., 2012). The purpose was to identify what managers consider essential for resilience in organizations and how they characterize it. The result of the process of understanding, classifying and building my own theory is represented by the core of the work – a three-column table. Quotes that emerged directly from the data, formulated with the own words of managers during the interviews can be found in the first column as first order concepts. These statements linked to resilience in organizations are pure and unchanged information. The second order categories are located in the second column. Various first order data are merged via thematic association into more thematic categories that allow a more abstract perspective on the topic and provide a deeper meaning than the first order data (Clark et al. 2010). The third order concepts, also called the “core categories” (O'Reilly et al., 2012, p.251), lift data to a higher and even more abstract and simplified level. They are the key indicators for resilient organizations and are supported through the other subcategories that provide more specific facts on the topic (O'Reilly et al., 2012).

As a result of the conceptualization of this research thirteen second order themes could be defined, which again could be merged to the four core categories. These four core categories are the abstract of almost 400 pages interview transcription.

## 2.1 Sample

The sample for this study is formed by a total of forty-eight organizational leaders. The majority is managers but also two commanding officers of Portuguese military, one



politician and three university professors have been included in the sample. In order to discover the collective perception of managers, I strove for interview partners from all managerial levels, working at organizations of different size. Since top managers have “key interpretational roles” (Isabella, 1990, p.10) the participation of top level managers was essential. Fortunately some senior managers, COOs and CEOs of multinationals and top consultancies in Portugal and Germany, could be included in the sample. The remaining positions of participants range from lower managerial levels up to middle and higher management positions. All informants are working in Portugal or Germany and have been selected because referring to the opinion of the interviewers they are considered to be resilient. Thirty-six interviews have been conducted in Portugal and twelve in Germany, whereof thirty-three were performed in Portuguese, twelve in German, two in English and one in French. This sample offers the opportunity to gain perspectives about organizational resilience out of different institutions, different levels of power and from different nationalities.

## **2.2 Procedure**

The interviews conducted in Portugal have been realized by students enrolled in the Lisbon MBA as part of the Organizational Behavior class after they have been trained for this type of data gathering. The interviews that took place in Germany have been realized by me within a time period of two weeks. Ahead of the interviews a letter with a short explication about the research project as well as the main areas of interest have been shared with potential informants. The topics that provided the frame for the conversations are: (1) How does the informant characterize organizational resilience, (2) What does he / she consider as drivers for resilience, (3) Impact on workplace environment through leadership, best practices and interpersonal relations (4) Cultural

consideration of resilience. After getting positive feedback the process of gathering data from disposed managers started. The interviews were semi-structured (see open guideline in the appendix) and it has been explained to the respondents that it would be an open conversation but that a baseline was set for context. Depending on the managers' preferences the meeting took place in their office or at their private homes. The average duration of the interviews was about half an hour, ranging from thirteen to thirty-nine minutes. Both, interviews in Portuguese and German have been recorded and in each case been transcribed in the original language in order to avoid any possible language adulteration.

From the beginning on the author did theoretical memoing, trying to conceptualize the incidents in order to evolve a theory (Glaser, 1998). Parallel to this data was constantly compared in order to evolve categories, which constantly have been adjusted depending on the information given in the interviews. When I felt that I couldn't gain new information from the interviews and that they did no longer contribute for the definition of new categories, I stopped data collection. Theoretical saturation was reached (O'Reilly et al., 2012).

### **3. Results**

Generally summarized the result of the constant comparison between data and theory is a reconceptualization, with an interpretative, creative step, that covers all aspects emerged in the data. As described in the procedure description before mentioned, the content of the interviews was summarized into three interpretive orders.

The process of analyzing and interpreting interviews in order to develop categories was plodding and not straight forward. I first coded the data parallel to the process of

interview realization and constantly correlated the different data in order to develop theory. When I ended up with nine categories first, I noticed that the results for the second order concepts have been too abstract and thus the evolved categories have not been satisfying. Therefore I decided to start the coding process all over again and analyzed every single interview transcription again - that time more specific. Continually the initial themes have been modified, new categories have been evolved when new findings could be gained and others have been eliminated. The new approach resulted in a total of thirteen themes, which could be grouped into four core categories. The research revealed that managers characterize resilient organizations to have, on the one hand a sense of proximity and a sense of openness (soft factors) and on the other hand a sense of challenge and a sense for structure (hard factors).

Figure 2 exposes the final categories that could be derived from the semi-structured interviews and is the core of this research project. In Table 1 the second order concepts are listed together with unchanged quotes from the interviews justifying the formation of the second order themes.

**Table 1 about here**

### **3.1 Soft factors**

As before denoted two third order concepts that have been evolved indicated that there was a “soft” side, when aiming to create resilience in organizations. The two core categories that form this soft side are explained through the supporting second order themes in the following.

**A sense of proximity:**

**Empathy.** Managers' express that certain characteristics of organizational leaders and also of other employees, actively contribute to organizational resilience. One of those characteristics is empathy. Especially in people business, like for example consulting empathy is crucial for many reasons. One needs to understand employees and colleagues in order to create high quality relations (Carmelli & Gittell, 2009) at the workplace and in order to keep qualified workforces. One informant pointed out the importance of the human factor in business during his interview:

“Consulting is people business so you have to know the restrictions of your employees. If somebody has to take care of a sick family member or has recently had a baby I will try to plan in a way that provides regular working hours for that employee and I won't pick him to send him to a client or event during the weekend if avoidable. Also if I know that for example the wife of a colleague was diagnosed cancer I can understand if somebody is not always a 100% with his thoughts at the work and my people can always talk with me. If you don't want to lose qualified employees you need to oblige them.”

Empathy is also of high importance regarding client relations. Knowing your clients and colleagues and emphasizing with them facilitates the matching process of choosing the right employee for the right project in order to optimize customer liaison. Sending the right people to “difficult” customers can be crucial for business success. Furthermore empathy is a key contributor to create a workplace atmosphere, where nobody needs to have fear. This is essential to enable learning organizations, which contribute to resilience (Carmelli & Gittell, 2009).

**Transparency.** An organizational characteristic essential for resilience in organizations is transparency. As one of the managers explained, only if a corporation is transparent everybody can understand the corporate goals and follow them. Transparency makes organizations credible. One of many ways to construct transparency is regular meetings

between the head of management and colleagues. Another step is to introduce new employees to all departments and processes not only to those they'll work at. An important component of transparency is clear and open communication plus the possibility to give feedback in and out as well as up and down. Only when we receive feedback we can learn from failures, a theory that has gained increasing importance in existing studies about organizational resilience. The quote of one of the informants exemplifies that to the point:

“One of the most important things for improvement and therefore for resilience is the ability to give feedback in all directions.”

During the process of data Collection I recognized that managers found it especially important to give employees the possibility to give feedback from down to top. Employees feedback can be very helpful because usually they are more close to processes and therefore to eventually raising difficulties concerning them. Accepting their feedback and implying their suggestions will give them the feeling of being respected and needed, what contributes to a positive workplace environment. As you can derive from the following statement it will additionally attract qualified personal to your organization:

“We survey our employees and implement their feedback. That is why we are elected to be one of the *great places to work at*.”

**Proximity.** Heterarchical features have been frequently named by informants as indispensable for resilience in organizations on a group level. Psychological proximity as well as physical proximity are both relevant for active and reactive resilience. According to the collected information “Low hierarchy and a cooperate style of

leadership are important for resilience.” Low hierarchy can result in a competitive advantage because it speeds communication:

“Nobody addresses somebody formally here in the company [...] This - in some way creates a very big proximity. We have extremely short ways of communication.”

Moreover proximity is crucial for teambuilding and quoting an informant “if employees feel like a real team, they will achieve anything.” Interestingly many respondents established a relationship between proximity and the comparison of German and Portuguese culture, claiming that Portugal and “southern countries in general” might have a better “human contact” one to another and thus a better atmosphere regarding interpersonal relationships. Beunza and Stark (2002) confirm the concept of proximity in a study about responsiveness of organizations after September 11. They point out that physical proximity, in this case offered by a common trading room, fosters innovation and thus recovery.

**Overarching dimension sense of proximity.** These three themes form the overarching dimension of a sense of proximity, where the human factor of organizations is highlighted. Empathy, transparency and proximity in organizations are all conducive for a strong network within the institution (Cooper et al., 2013) and thus for positive interactions between employees which are the basement for organizational resilience (Cunha et al., 2013). Low hierarchy strengthens psychological safety and improves communication within a company. The importance of proximity in organizations is also supported by the advice of one of the interviewed top managers: Huge companies should be operated like a federation of many small firms.

**A sense of openness:**

**Diversity.** Through diversity within an establishment there is a broader perspective on arising adversities. People from different cultural backgrounds and different expertise will automatically show different problem solving approaches. In the day to day business dissent-orientated discussions are facilitated through diversity. As one manager, leading a department stated

“...every employee is an enrichment, the more different nationalities and fields of study we combine here the better for the quality of our work. It is important to have different perspectives and opinions.”

However organizational diversity is not only about specialization areas and culture but also about gender. Another respondent for instance expressed his desire for a better gender balance in the business world in order to implement a better work place atmosphere.

“The company reaches the peak of harmony when there is a good equilibrium between men and women.”

Another participant of the study added that a nerd can be useful but will never be a key person for organizational resilience. Since there are limits of what training can contribute a possibility to improve resilience within a department with little resilient staff members is to build contrarian couples. According to Sutcliffe & Vogus (2003, p.105) “teams composed of people who are experientially broad may be better at recombining exiting knowledge, skills, and abilities into novel combinations.”

**Freedom.** Freedom in organizations is critical, because institutions consist of individuals and every individual has other strength and weaknesses. Thus fixed patterns might be appropriate for some personalities and obstructive for others. In order to

achieve the best organizational outcome possible leaders should provide suitable basic conditions and at the same time give sufficient freedom to the workforce and let them develop their own procedures of how to achieve predetermined goals. As delineated by one of the surveyed managers it is ideal to

”give employees a perspective of how they can do the work and let them develop and define their own management style”,

What is important about the concept of freedom is the clear delegation of responsibilities prior to the beginning of a project. So that everybody knows the determined goal and deadlines and then chooses his or her own way to achieve it:

“In my department everybody knows what to do until when and I let it do them their way.”

The extended form of freedom is the concept of working exclusively from home office, as one participator of this research does:

“We are all working from home-office. That way I decide when and how I want to work. What matters for the company are results.”

This concept, as a major advantage, makes organizations reduce expenses significant because they have little to no costs for rent. As a result they can offer lower prices to their clients giving the company a competitive advantage and creating active resilience.

**Reinvention and flexibility.** Reinvention and flexibility were persistent themes for the informants. Actually organizational resilience has even been characterized as “the intern ability to realize changes quickly and the ability of an organization to reinvent itself constantly.” An interesting hypothesis developed by one of the interviewees that provides a possibility for further research is that

“...one of the most resilient industries is the automotive industry because only organizations who have the ability for reinvention over and over again survive in this industry.”



The data showed that managers find it crucial to follow their company's goal and remain flexible at the same time. Organizations striving for resilience should not wait for change but actively try to predict and influence it. Seville (2008, p.8) confirms the here evolved theme by emphasizing that the "generation and evaluation of new ideas is recognized as the key to the organization's future performance."

**Overarching dimension sense of openness.** The second overarching dimension refers to openness. Corporations cannot always keep the routine in daily business. Instead they also have to pay attention to what others do, recognize upcoming trends on time and be open minded towards input of their workforce. To implement this, organizations should focus on diversity, think "out of the box" and give room for growth to their employees.

### **3.2 Hard factors**

Opposed to the, in detail explained, themes representing the soft factors of organizational resilience, two overarching dimension attributed to the hard side of organizational resilience will be examined in the following.

#### **A sense of challenge:**

**Self-confidence.** Leaders need to be able to delegate responsibility and employees on the other side need to be willing to take responsibility. Thus both sides need a certain level of self-confidence. This personal characteristic is also relevant because offering resistance is crucial in certain situations (e.g. negotiation) and then self-confident labor is very valuable. In very tough business branches self-confidence is so essential that this

characteristic actually acts as a natural instrument of selection, as a manager of a legal consultancy stressed:

“You really need self-confidence to contribute to the resilience of the enterprise. It is kind of a natural selection. In really tough but resilient organizations only people who are self-confident are staying there.”

Furthermore self-confident individuals will share their opinion more easily than shy colleagues. This is important because dissent orientated discussions are an enrichment for establishments and thus it is more than desirable that employees share their opinion even if they do not agree with the others.

**Commitment.** The workforce's level of commitment is the most important element when high performance is required. Thus the COO of a consultancy reveals:

“We only contract employees, who are willing to deliver high performance and that is really high performance! That means that they come to our company already with a very competitive approach. If you want to work with us you have to commit yourself completely.”

Competitiveness is crucial for organizational resilience and will never be achieved without commitment: “Without the human element of commitment to the task, commitment to each other, preparedness wouldn't have done anything. The best plan would have never opened up” (Beunza and Stark, 2003, p.149). Commitment is clearly linked to motivation thus the optimum are employees, who work for pleasure and not solely for monetary compensation. Fortunately this is the case, regarding some informants of this study:

“I love going to work. It is fun. Here at BMW it is also really the pleasure for the product that matters “Freude am fahren”<sup>1</sup>, as our business motto states.”

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<sup>1</sup> German for “pleasure of driving”

**Optimism.** When adversities arise optimism is very important. If one doesn't believe in what he does, he will never succeed. Therefore optimism clearly is a characteristic that makes some individuals more resilient than others (Cunha et al., 2013, p.12). The managers who have been interviewed also pointed this out repeatedly:

“Optimism is essential, if you have to face adversity it is always important to understand “it is worth to endure this all”.

Furthermore the informants' propose that leaders should transmit optimism to their employees by “downsizing the importance of a problem, when employees appeal to them.”

**Competence.** Resilience “hinges on individual training, experience, and the development of specialized knowledge” (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003, p.103). This quote is in line with my findings derived from the collected data:

“ It [resilience] is all about training and experience of the employees.”

According to the surveyed managers competence is another characteristic that differentiates resilient leaders from non resilient ones because it is claimed that “resilient people are more competent and have a better understanding of teamwork.”

**Overarching dimension sense of challenge.** The penultimate overarching dimension, representing a hard factor of organizational resilience, is the sense of challenge. In order to master a challenge successfully managers and their teams need to be: (1) Self-confident, when they compete against other teams. (2) Fully committed, because motivated teams deliver the best results. (3) Be optimistic, otherwise they might give up to quick instead of struggling through adversity. (4) Be competent in order to convince clients with quality.

**A sense for structure:**

**Realism.** As stated before, optimism is considered an important element for organizational resilience. However it is crucial to keep a sense for realism at the same time. Otherwise unlimited optimism could actually turn into a danger. Optimism is only positive for resilience in combination with a sense for reality. Some informants characterized resilience itself as “the ability to see problems coming”. Furthermore it was claimed that

“...you need to have the capacity to accept the reality as it is and make the best out of it instead of losing time and energy complaining about it.”

After identifying reality the processes of the organization have to be adapted to it.

**Security.** In combination with the second order theme freedom employees do also need security at the same time. A manager described this phenomenon as following:

“It is very important to feel safe at the workplace. Secure but also free. May be you can compare it to a horse on a paddock. The horse needs freedom but in order to feel safe it also needs the fence around the paddock.”

Security in this case refers to both, psychological and physical safety. In order to create psychological security an important step is to share risks and allow failure (Cunha et al, 2013). Creating physical security for example is important for labor working in fabrics. Working with up-to-date machines that are controlled regularly will give employees a feeling of security, whereas if machines were a danger for their physical health they would not be able to work very committed because they would often be afraid.

**Corporate structure and values.** The corporate structure of a resilient company promotes a positive climate and corporate values verifiably influence the identification of employees with their workplace (Maddi & Khoshaba, 2005). Often the structure of

corporations organizes employees in teams. Those teams are crucial for resilience – thus one informant for example is of the opinion that any organization can survive without a resilient leader for at least two years or more, if covered by a strong team.

Another manager states that

“... it is crucial to communicate the values of the organization to the employees and to teach them how to pursue them sustainably.”

**Overarching dimension sense for structure.** The last overarching dimension, derived from the analysis and interpretation of the collected data is a sense for structure. If a company is well structured, implemented mechanism will make the organization thrive through adversity. In order to do so it is important that defined processes are in line with reality, that labor feels safe and that the structure supports teambuilding as well as the communication of corporate values.

#### **4. Further results and discussion**

This study suggests that organizational resilience can be divided into soft and hard factors, a finding that is in line with past research on a conceptual model's approach to organizational resilience (Gibson & Tarrant, 2010). The managers' characterization of organizational resilience can be described as a combination of adaptability, forward looking realism, risk management, innovativeness and the ability of an organization to deal with adversity.

The main drivers for resilience are a sense of proximity, a sense of openness, a sense of challenge as well as a sense for structure. Other results of this study are that the ideal for managers is the creation of active resilience within organizations and is the preferred

concept to reactive resilience, because it strengthens the robustness and hardiness broadly and thus improves the level of preparedness.

Furthermore the majority of informants established a clear link between resilience and cultural qualities. It has been clearly defined that some typical German attitudes like perfectionism for example are an obstacle for organizational resilience:

“Not everything has to be completed always a 100%. This German way of thinking could be an obstacle sometimes, because it also brings less flexibility and hinders them to accept other projects and therefore also hinders a certain change, which in other countries might have been conducted a long time ago already.”

Portuguese organizations are thought to be structured simpler but more solution orientated, while Germans sometimes tend to create an artificial complexity of things.

Drivers for organizational resilience out of the managerial perspective have been evolved and practical implications to improve organizational resilience have been given together with the presentations of the results.

The issue of connection between typical national attitudes and their influence on organizational resilience provides interesting possibilities for further research.

The study also delivers various arguments to give more importance to organizational resilience, what yet is inferior in Europe – especially in comparison to the USA.

## **5. Conclusion**

Analyzing organizational resilience from a theoretical and managerial perspective, the purpose was to highlight the main drivers for organizational resilience. As a result four inter-dependant core categories emerged. These themes show the complexity of organizational resilience: it comprises much more than “to bounce back from adversity”. On the one side there is a human factor about the concept, that points out the

importance of proximity within organizations in order to build strong networks. Furthermore organizations that thrive for resilience need to be able to think out of the box and be open-minded. On the other hand there is a tougher side about the concept that is not less important. In order to achieve the best outcome possible organizations should also stimulate a sense of challenge and be very well structured. The challenging task about the implementation of the results might be the right balance between the tough and soft side, since the perfect balance of both it is a very fine line.

Furthermore, the here established dimensions of resilience always have to be seen and implemented in their specific cultural context. As the cross-cultural comparison component of this study shows every culture has its own strengths and strategies to build and foster resilience.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Guideline**

1. How would you define resilience? Are there any particular characteristics to measure resilience – on a personal and on an organizational level as well as in teams?
2. Do you think there is a correlation between personal resilience and organizational resilience? Or do you think both types of resilience can exist independently? Can an Organization be resilient independently from the resilience of its leader?
3. In your opinion, which indicators determine the resilience of leaders (on different levels) and what can they do in order to maintain or increase their resilience?
4. Does your Organization work with any best practices for creating a positive Organization? Does the management try to respond to the individual situation of each employee (e.g. do you try to offer support for their families if needed)?
5. How do you deal with new employees? What actions are being taken in order to integrate them the best way possible and to make them identify themselves with the values, vision and mission of the company?
6. In what way does the German culture matter when building resilience in your Organization? Can you identify any characteristics of the German culture that might be a barrier for building organizational resilience?
7. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 not resilient at all; 10 very resilient) how resilient would you consider yourself to be and why?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

### **Interview Sample**

Sample of 48 Interviews:

- 33 in Portuguese
- 12 in German
- 2 in English
- 1 in French

Managers, Members of Military, Politicians  
and University Professors

**Figure 1: Information about the sample**



Table 1: Representing supporting data for each 2<sup>nd</sup> order theme

Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep in mind the personal background of an employee in order to understand him.</li> <li>• Consulting is people business so you have to know the restrictions of your employees (e.g. sick family member, baby at home etc).</li> <li>• Create an atmosphere where nobody needs to have fear.</li> <li>• Applying pressure (on employees) you will get the exact opposite of resilience.</li> <li>• Make sure employees can always ask in case they have doubts.</li> <li>• Never raise your voice this will put yourself in a bad light and will make the other person afraid / uncomfortable instead try to always behave in a way that people respect you and also make them feel that they can talk to you about everything and that you will always try to understand them. Don't frighten them.</li> </ul>
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We survey our employees and implement their feedback. That is why we are one of the "great places to work at".</li> <li>• Listen to their (employees) feedback and implement it as good as possible. That way employees will be more satisfied and you will be too.</li> <li>• One of the most important things for improvement and therefore for resilience is the ability to give feedback in all directions.</li> <li>• Meetings with head of management and colleagues on regular basis</li> <li>• We work with instruments like progress dialog, compass dialog, in which objectives are formulated and it is discussed whether one achieved them or not.</li> <li>• The whole organization needs to be really transparent so that everybody can understand the goals and follow them. Even if the goals have not been reached it should be communicated. Employees will feel "taken along" then and everybody will work together on new common goals then. This strengthens the resilience for sure.</li> </ul>
Proximity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low hierarchy and a cooperative style of leadership are important for resilience.</li> <li>• The first line of leadership, that treats our most important day-to-day problems of teams within the organization is somebody who is present in the teams. This means there is a huge proximity.</li> <li>• Nobody addresses somebody formally here in the company [...] This - in some way creates a very big proximity. We have extremely short ways of communication.</li> <li>• If the employees feel like a real team they will achieve everything. Team building is very important.</li> <li>• The sense of togetherness is very important within the organizations. Therefore the Integration of new employees is very important as well.</li> <li>• Nobody should feel alone.</li> </ul>
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A nerd can be useful but he will not be the key person for the creation of organizational resilience.</li> <li>• The company reaches the peak of harmony when there is a good equilibrium between men and women.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every employee is an enrichment, the more different nationalities and fields of study we combine here the better for the quality of our work. It is important to have different perspectives and opinions.</li> <li>• There are limits of what training can do. The only way to improve resilience when you have non-resilient employees is to build contrarian couples.</li> <li>• My interest as a manager is it to enable a dissent-orientated discussion with the employees</li> <li>• We are multicultural. In my team I have an Arab, a French and a Rumanian, they bring different perspectives into the work.</li> </ul>
Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let employees grow through no control but by letting them do their work and see the results –trust them.</li> <li>• Give employees a perspective of how they can do the work and let them develop and define their own management style.</li> <li>• As a leader I have to create the right environment and conditions: Freedom but security at the same time.</li> <li>• We are all working from home-office. That way I decide when and how I want to work. What matters for the company are results.</li> <li>• In my department everybody knows what to do until when and I let it do them their way.</li> </ul>
Reinvention and Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be successful (in long term) you really have to change yourself (the organization) permanently</li> <li>• When I say enterprises have to change I don't mean change just in order to change something but in order advance .</li> <li>• One of the most resilient industries is the automotive industry because only organizations who have the ability for reinvention over and over again survive in this industry.</li> <li>• Organizations that want to be successful have to think out of the box.</li> <li>• To be successful don't wait for changes but actively try to predict and influence them</li> <li>• One has to follow the goal and remain flexible at the same time.</li> </ul>
Self-confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-confidence is also important. One has also to be able to offer resistance.</li> <li>• You really need self-confidence to contribute to the resilience of the enterprise. It is kind of a natural selection. In really tough but resilient organizations only people who are self-confident stay there.</li> <li>• A leader has to have self-composure in order to avoid pressure.</li> <li>• What is important for a resilient organization is the people's willingness to take responsibility.</li> <li>• A good manager knows his strength but also knows when to ask for help.</li> <li>• One has to have the ability to carry ones point and to take the right decisions in certain situations.</li> <li>• I think success is a question of will-power.</li> <li>• A leader has a role model function for the rest of the company.</li> </ul>

Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You always have to put yourself suffering and force yourself and I think the most successful are those who per predisposition don't have a problem with it or the ones that simply fight it out.</li> <li>• You need self motivated people and you need the motivation of every single one.</li> <li>• What is also important is the perspective that you can develop within the organization. In financial terms as well as regarding your career / position.</li> <li>• It is not necessary to force them (employees) to do something, they do it naturally.</li> <li>• I love going to work. It is fun. Here at BMW it is also really the pleasure for the product that matters "Freude am fahren", as our business motto states.</li> <li>• We only contract employees that are willing to deliver high performance and that is really high performance! That means that they come to our company already with a very competitive approach. If you want to work with us you have to commit yourself completely.</li> <li>• We always have to acquire new orders. It's a constant battle and people are trained for it. You have to fight.</li> </ul>
Optimism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first thing I do when employees come to me with a problem is to downsize the importance of the problem.</li> <li>• Just always keep in mind "I can do it even if this is unpleasing."</li> <li>• Nowadays what is missing sometimes is the ability to struggle through something and not to always give up quickly.</li> <li>• Faith is to strongly believe in what we are doing.</li> <li>• Optimism is essential, if you have to face adversity it is always important to understand "it is worth to endure this all".</li> </ul>
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What differentiates resilient managers from non resilient ones is their competence. Mostly competent managers are also more resilient, because they are more self-competent about their area.</li> <li>• We always offer product related trainings in order to prepare the employees the best possible way for the market.</li> <li>• We want to convince and differentiate from the rest with the quality of our product.</li> <li>• It is all about training and experience of the employees.</li> <li>• Resilient people are more competent and have a better understanding of teamwork.</li> <li>• We are offered workshops and trainings in order to advance in our area of choice.</li> </ul>
Realism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to have the capacity to accept the reality as it is and make the best out of it instead of losing time and energy complaining about it.</li> <li>• Besides of competence you need a sense of reality to see how things really are.</li> <li>• I consider myself resilient because I can estimate situations within the organization quite well.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything in our organization is based on defined processes and the problem is they do not always accord with reality this inhibits the resilience very strongly.</li> <li>• Resilience is the ability to see problems coming.</li> <li>• Yes you really need optimism, but on the other hand be aware of those crazy unrealistic guys that think everything is possible without limits. A loss of realism can be very dangerous.</li> </ul>
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is very important to feel safe at the workplace. Secure but also free. May be you can compare it to a horse on a paddock. The horse needs freedom but in order to feel safe it also needs the fence around the paddock.</li> <li>• Get to know all the different sections of the organization, also the ones you are not going to work at.</li> <li>• The structure of big companies is important for their resilience. They have more buffer than small companies.</li> <li>• It is important to share the risk and to allow failure.</li> <li>• Solidarity and support for our employees in times of struggle is essential. Because who wants to receive has to give first.</li> </ul>
Corporate structure and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is crucial to communicate the values of the organization to the employees and to teach them how to pursue them (values) sustainable.</li> <li>• In companies with a certain size you need hierarchy, otherwise nothing would work out. We try to combine both: We have higher hierarchy regarding the overall company and low hierarchy within the projects.</li> <li>• Of course life-work balance is very important. I need to refill batteries at the weekends being with friends and family and doing sports. The company need to make that possible.</li> <li>• In order to avoid a high status of employees sick and stressed employees offer perks like Oasis of Wellness, a silent room or a room with massage chairs and music .</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Data structure

